

Editors,

Your series on immigration (October 13-16) was very timely and generally well done, but having studied the subject for over 40 years, I would make a few emendations.

It is naive to say that the Immigration Reform and Control Act had "unintended consequences." They may have been unintended by Romano Mazzoli (D., KY), and Alan Simpson (R, WY), principal authors of the bill, but by the time lobbyists and their congressional acolytes got through, the consequences were obvious to ~~the~~ those ~~who were against it~~ with any knowledge of history. The Act became the creature largely of agribusiness, more particularly California agribusiness, which argued successfully, as it has for some 120 years, that it must have a cheap, disadvantaged, docile, usually foreign, usually dark-skinned, usually non-English-speaking labor force to survive.

The amnesty provision gave ^{agribusiness} ~~corporate farmers~~ a "dream of heaven" (Carey McWilliams' phrase for the bracero program) in the form of 1,200,000 illegal farm workers who were suddenly legalized. (The Republican floor ^{initially} leader of the debate/acknowledged the number might be at least that high. More about him in amoment.)

But ~~corporate farmers~~ ^{agribusinessmen} and their lobbyists realized that meant their former "wetbacks" would be free from fear of deportation and ^{in time} would/move ~~out~~ into the larger U.S. society. So they riddled the Act with loopholes intended to guarantee them with a continued supply of labor that was cheap, docile, etc. The keystone in the arch of the original Simpson-Mazzoli bill ^{to be} was/sactions, ~~against~~ for the first time, not just against illegal aliens hungry for work, but against employers who took advantage of the hunger of those workers. This was repeatedly watered down, to the point ^{where} ~~which~~/your reporters correctly observe it has become unenforceable. It was watered down, not at the behest of Silicon Valley/or any other industry, but only ^{workers} (which became interested in foreign ~~labor~~ ^{labor}) at the demands of corporate agriculture. So -- wink, wink, nudge, nudge -- if our ^{can} newly-legalized illegals leave for greener pastures, we ~~will~~/replace them with new illegals, ad infinitum, with ~~any~~ never any penalty to us.

Secondly, I don't see how you can run a four-part series on immigration, ~~largely unexamined~~ which seems to conclude hopelessly that nothing can be done to slake the thirst of California agribusiness for cheap Mexican labor, without a single word about ^{one of the two} ~~the~~ obvious solution: to bring agribusiness wages and working conditions to equivalence with other basic American industries. (The other ^{obvious} solution, to ~~bring up Mexican~~ improve wages and working conditions in Mexico itself, lies outside the power of the U.S.) How does it happen that no undocumented workers, ^{employed} ~~amnestied-~~ illegals, green-carders, are ~~used~~ at the minimum wage in the automobile industry? Would it possibly have anything to do with the fact that auto workers are organized into a union? Would it possibly have anything to do with the fact all other industrial workers are covered by wage-and-hour laws, etc... Your writers say not a word about the efforts of Cesar Chavez ^{and others} ~~to~~ ~~deal with the problem~~ by unionizing farm workers, nor a word about the efforts of Jerry Brown, and others, to deal with the problem through legislation simply calling for agribusiness to be viewed as any other basic industry, requiring employers to bargain collectively with their employees under democratic conditions.

Finally, your writers do not mention any of the players on the stage at the time of the passage of the fateful Simpson-Mazzoli Act. Some of those on the stage at that time perceived it would do more harm than good: Dick Gephardt, John Conyers, Barbara Boxer. Some of those who voted for it did so only out of loyalty to Peter Rodino, retiring chairman of the Judiciary Committee, who had rendered exemplary service to the country during Watergate, but had had almost nothing to do with the immigration bill. These loyalists ^{and} included ~~Al Gore~~ Al Gore, ^{and} Tom Daschle. And then there were those who voted ~~against~~ for it because... well, it didn't benefit Henry Hyde's district, or Trent Lott's district, or Newt Gingrich's district. They ~~seem to have~~ apparently voted for it because the party leadership told them to and who was the party leader carrying the bill in the House of Representatives?

from Long Beach

Your reporters nowhere mention the name of a 37 year-old congressman/ who had somehow worked himself up to ranking member of the House Judiciary subcommittee on immigration. His name was Dan Lungren. He pled the case for

legalization of undocumented workers, he pled the case for unforceable employer sanctions, and he even pled the case for a so-called "guest worker" program that would have been in the words of Henry Gonzalez...

The ~~latter~~ "rent-a-slave" program ~~was introduced in~~ passed the House ~~xx~~ but was eliminated in conference with the Senate. It was proposed anew, within the past two weeks, by grower spokespersons who will never ~~xxx~~ stop asking for a government-guaranteed supply of cheap labor unless and until they are dragged kicking and screaming into the next millenium.

Oddly enough, Gray Davis seems unaware of -- at least, he has not mentioned -- Dan Lungren's role ~~as leading~~ in carrying the water for ~~the 1986 Act with~~ agribusiness in crafting the immigration act of 1986 with its "unintended" but calamitous consequences. The electorate should know that if they vote for Lungren, they are voting for the man who is more/than ~~almost~~ ^{responsible} ^{active} any other/California politician for the immigration mess you so rightly chronicle in your four-part series.